

make that reporters had to wonder about this vaunted "compatibility" Carter was supposedly so sure about.

Carter moved on to his next event, speaking beside Jerry Brown in a ballroom at the Hilton. Brown introduced him with evident lack of enthusiasm. Carter said of Brown, "we've grown to be close friends" — which was not even close to true. Then he rhetorically insulted his vanquished foe: "There's no limits on us. Material limits, yes. Governmental limits, yes. But I'm not ready to recognize that there's a limit to hope, to freedom, to individuality."

Then it was time for Madison Square Garden, where all was celebration.

A GIANT RED-WHITE-AND-BLUE BEACH BALL BOINGED FESTIVELY FROM one cheering delegation to the next. A section of the gallery flashed cards reading, TEXAS LOVES NEW YORK. Others broke out into singing. The banners flanking the rostrum read, "FOR AMERICA'S THIRD CENTURY, WHY NOT THE BEST." Mondale made his maiden speech, a post-Watergate jeremiad. The line that got the biggest applause of the night: "Roosevelt said that the presidency is preeminently a place of moral leadership. But we have just lived the *Worst, Political, Scandal*, in American history" — *stab, stab, stab*, went his finger with each word — "and are now led by a President who pardoned the person who did it."

He concluded, "The year of our two hundredth birthday, the year of the election of Jimmy Carter, will go down as one of the greatest years of public reform in American history." The standing ovation was so enthusiastic that Robert Strauss had to beg for order.

The lights went down; a movie screen was lowered: Jimmy Carter in jeans, in a peanut field; Jimmy Carter in a suit, speaking noble words. Jimmy Carter rendered in cartoon form — or at least Jimmy Carter's teeth: "Jimmy!" Rosalynn calls out from the dark. "Cut it out and go to sleep!" Uproarious laughter.

Strauss introduced "the next President of the United States." Carter's smile was at least that glowing as he walked forth in an unprecedented way: from the rear, through the delegate floor, working his way through the crowd, shaking hands, shouting greetings — a man of the people. A man of love.

He bolted up the stairs. He planted himself on the rostrum, family by his side:

"My name is Jimmy Carter, and I'm running for President!"

Roars.

It was an even funnier joke than the glow-in-the-dark teeth. That

was the line he'd said a thousand times before, in Iowa, in New Hampshire, in primaries across the fruited plain. *I'm running for president: President of what?* his mother had asked when he told him that more than three years before. No one was asking that now.

He made a kind of Democratic inside joke: it was a pleasure "to see that our Bicentennial celebration and our Bicentennial convention has been one of decorum and order without any fights or free-for-alls. Among Democrats that can only happen once every two hundred years." He was interrupted by applause for the fifth time — and it was only his fifth sentence.

He promised that 1976 could be "a year of inspiration and hope," a year "when we give the government of this country back to the people of this country," the year of a "new mood in America." He said, "This has been a long and personal campaign — a humbling experience, reminding us that ultimate political influence rests not with power-brokers, but with the people."

He spoke of his memories of himself as a farm boy; hailed the great Democrats who came before him; and said, "Our country has lived through a time of torment. It is now a time for healing. We want to have faith again. We want to be proud again. We just want the truth again. It is time for the people to run the government, and not the other way around!" He spoke of America's "mistakes": "the tragedy of Vietnam and Cambodia, the disgrace of Watergate and the embarrassment of the CIA revelations" — all of which could have been avoided if only "our government had simply reflected the sound judgment and the good common sense and the high moral character of the American people."

And they interrupted him with acclaim for the twenty-fifth time. He built up momentum:

"It's time for our government leaders to respect the law no less than the humblest citizen" — he was interrupted with lusty cheers in the middle of the sentence — "so that we can end once and for all a double standard of justice. I see no reason — *I see no reason!* — why big-shot crooks should go free and the poor ones go to jail."

That got a standing ovation.

"We have an America that, in Bob Dylan's phrase, is busy being born — not busy dying!"

"We can have an American government that has turned away from scandal and corruption and official cynicism and is once again as decent and as competent as its people. . . ."

"As I've said many times before, we can have an American President who does not govern with negativism and fear of the future, but with

The official record noted the fifty-fifth ovation of the speech. And then the emotion crescendoed yet more.

And then he called up Daddy King—the father of the civil rights martyr.

He preached: "Surely the Lord is in this place. Surely the Lord sent Jimmy Carter to come on out and bring America back where she belongs."

And America's Democrats, assembled at the big Baptist church called Madison Square Garden, bowed their heads, and some indeed fell to their knees. He bent over double, he raised his fists to the heavens, he preached some more: "I've been doing this sixty-odd years, I have had my trials, my tribulations, my ups and downs, my losses, but I'm determined I'm not going to let nothing get me down!" He thundered: "I'm going on and see what the *end* is going to be to all of this! This Lord *blesssss* you! And *keeeep* you! The Lord makes His face to *shine* upon you, and be *gracious* unto you. The Lord lifts up the light of his countenance upon you!—and gives you!—peace. Noooooooooo! And *alllllllways!*"

The convention orchestra struck up "We Shall Overcome," and an audience that had become a congregation sang along with tears streak-

"Now he was walking into the convention hall of his party's national convention to get the nomination, and the delegates, including most established powers, were on their feet cheering their heads off. Some were even crying. . . ."

Harris polled the American people to see what they thought. They wanted Carter over Ford by 66 percent to 27, Carter over Reagan 68 to 26—the greatest postconvention margin ever. Which meant that Republicans and independents believed, too.

Hicans and independents believed, too

CHAPTER THIRTY

"You're in the Catbird Seat"

JIMMY CARTER HAD SAID IN HIS ACCEPTANCE SPEECH, "WITH THIS KIND of a united Democratic Party, we are ready and eager to take on the Republicans, whichever Republican Party they decide to send against us in November." Which was no more clear in the middle of July than it had been in the middle of June. "Republican professionals," *Newsweek* reported, feared "a nasty summer, a bloody convention—and a party split so badly that only a shotgun pairing of Ford and Reagan on the same ticket could heal it." But Ronald Reagan had categorically ruled out running on the same ticket with Ford. So there was no healing to be had. The name of the game was now the 150 or so "uncommitted" delegates—and the game was so heartily silly that when a political cartoon depicted Marine One hovering over a remote country store, one woman explaining to another, "That must be President Ford again... Merle's an uncommitted delegate, you know," it hardly felt like a joke at all. One obscure Republican official from Suffolk County, New York, emerged from a ten-minute audience announcing that the Leader of the Free World had agreed to take a closer look at the problems of his local sewage district. And when the queen of England arrived at the White House for a sumptuous state dinner, the gentleman the president chose to seat next to her was Clarke Reed, chairman of the largest uncommitted delegation—Mississippi's, with thirty convention votes. The joke went around that another uncommitted delegate, from New Jersey, had received the same invitation from the president. He paused, then asked: "What's on the menu?"

Ford was hardly governing. He was campaigning, like a ward heeler—one voter at a time. A crew of uncommitteds would be ushered into the Cabinet Room or the East Room or the Blue Room or even the State Dining Room. The chairs would be set up as at a press conference. The president would mingle informally for a half an hour, then stand behind a podium for ten minutes relating his accomplishments, then open the floor to questions—tough questions: about his pardon of Nixon;

about his views on abortion, on offshore oil drilling or the closing of a military base in a delegate's backyard. The ritual went on for as long as it took, for an hour or sometimes more.

Before any delegate got to that point he'd already been well massaged on the phone—an intricate strategic operation that involved consulting an elaborate binder, updated daily, in which each delegate's ideology, employment, spouse's name and children's names and ages, hobbies, what issues the delegate cared about ("upset about federal regulation of independent dairy producers," read the entry for a delegate named Charles N. Dodd, which also noted that he should be addressed as "Chuck"), religion... and, most crucially, the names of the Republican officials most likely to hold sway over his loyalties. Constant follow-up babysitting calls—*What do you need? What do you want?*—came next, exquisitely calculated to stop just shy of feeling like pressure.

Reagan, lacking a state dining room or Marine helicopter, did the same work in hotel suites, deploying his own special secret weapon: charm. Whenever Ford or Reagan moved a single delegate—after a conclave with Reagan at the Penn-Harris Motor Inn in Harrisburg, a twenty-one-year-old college student and former Ford-leaner named James Stein "emerged from the meeting... to announce that he was now 'unleaned'"—it was news in the *Washington Post* or the *New York Times*.

The final round of state conventions had come the weekend of July 9. On July 6, Reagan had rented a half hour on ABC. His speech projected the confidence of a general-election candidate. Mentioning neither Ford nor Kissinger, he called for a "New Coalition" of Republicans and right-leaning Democrats and Independents. He thrust a dagger at Jimmy Carter: "You can't get to the heart of an issue by being vague about it. I'm not asking you to help me because I say, 'Trust me, don't ask questions, and everything will be fine.' I ask you to trust yourself. Trust your own knowledge of what's happening in America." (Then, aiming at the Catholic swing vote, he repeated one of his favorite quotations—from Pope Pius XII: "The American people have a genius for great and unselfish deeds. Into the hands of America, God has placed the destiny of an afflicted mankind.")

One thousand one hundred thirty delegates were needed for the nomination. The *New York Times* said Ford had 1,067 committed to him and Reagan had 1,043. On Friday Ford pulled in twelve in Nebraska, four went for Reagan, and two emerged uncommitted. The president gave a surprise press conference in which he said his earlier statements that Reagan was not qualified to be president should be con-

sidered "political license" and that now "I exclude nobody." (The Times: "FORD NOW FINDS REAGAN QUALIFIED TO BE PRESIDENT.") On July 10 Evans and Novak reported, "President Ford's fractious campaign is lurching toward his increasingly probable nomination in an atmosphere contaminated by recriminations, backstabbing, and personal power plays which have brought the campaign to the brink of anarchy." Then that night Reagan emerged with fifteen of sixteen at-large delegates from Colorado. It had been ugly: the pro-Ford convention chairman slashed his hand across his throat to have Reagan's microphone cut after he exceeded a supposed ten-minute time limit; then the president's son Jack was allowed to go on for sixteen minutes.

The *Washington Post* said the score was now Ford 1,052, Reagan 995.

ALL EYES TURNED SOUTH—FIRST TO PLAINS, GEORGIA, POPULATION SIX hundred, where another sort of joyous summer political festival was under way. At the tiny town's quaint little railroad depot, which Carter folks had shrewdly turned into his symbolic national campaign headquarters, Fritz and his pal Jimmy gave an impromptu press conference filled with humor and good cheer. The Georgian was challenged by a reporter who wondered if the Minnesotan was willing to undergo a grueling campaign, having given up on the idea in 1974. Carter responded earnestly, "There is no doubt in my mind that he would be willing"—and then a reporter interrupted by recalling Mondale's quip upon quitting that he didn't want to "spend the rest of my life in Holiday Inns." Carter looked over at his running mate, smiled, and handed him the microphone. Mondale, after pausing with fine comic timing: "I've checked and found they've all been redecorated. They're marvelous places to stay and I've thought it over and that's where I'd like to be."

The press corps cooed at eight-year-old Amy and her cute cat, Misty Malarky Ying Yang. The reporters challenged the Secret Service to a softball game. The Democratic nominee pitched for each team; Ralph Nader, the scourge of corporate America, umpired, wearing a suit and tie despite the stifling heat. A boom sounded in the distance. Secret Service agents rushed to the source: the gas station owned by Jimmy's little brother Billy, where a spark from a vending machine had set off a three-thousand-gallon oil truck. How refreshing it must have been to witness an explosion not caused by the New World Liberation Front or the Red Guerrilla Family or the Weather Underground. It took but ten minutes for the tiny Plains fire department to contain the blaze; afterward, Billy handed out free beer. A reporter asked what his first thought had been

when he heard the blast. He answered, "What was in that damn cash register. Saturday is a big day."

Billy—"Cast Iron," according to the family nickname, for the stomach that seemed to withstand any abuse, especially from the beers he poured down his gullet one after the other after the other—was a star attraction. Reporters flocked to his Amoco station—one of only two places in town to buy beer. He had run for alderman, the story went, won, and made his first political act voting himself a liquor license; the only other filling station in town was owned by teetotalers. ("Billy gets the drinkers and the Williams boys get the Baptists," Mayor A. L. Blanton explained.) There Billy held court on a wooden crate, chewing the fat with good ol' boys, just like he did even when the likes of Clark Clifford weren't blowing through town. He told reporters, "I got a mamma who joined the Peace Corps and went to India when she was sixty-eight. I got one sister who's a holy-roller preacher. I got another sister who wears a helmet and rides a motorcycle. And I got a brother who thinks he's going to be president. So that makes me the only sane person in the family."

He told Mike Royko how he'd liked New York (seventy-four Carter relatives attended the convention: Dogpatch at Madison Square Garden). "I went to this big party that *Rollin' Stone* magazine threw, and there were all kinds of celebrities there, I guess. They took my picture and the *Washington Post* put it in the paper. I told the editor I'm gonna sue him. He put me in the society page instead of where I belong. Haw! I belong in the police news. . . . Anyway, I met this nice fella and he took me to lunch today. Turns out he's president of the Atlantic Richfield Oil Company."

The Billy Carter fad was of a piece with a new facet of the national mood. People called it "Redneck Chic." The Allman Brothers and Billy Carter. The hard-stompin' boogie of ZZ Top, whose *Worldwide Texas Tour* opened that spring and packed auditoriums and stadiums across the country for the next eighteen months, and included onstage some 260 speakers, 130 lights, a longhorn steer, a bison, two vultures, a veritable garden of cacti, and two very live rattlesnakes. And citizens band radios—especially citizens band radios: "that Japanese toy, the trucker's joy," as the country song put it.

Millions of Americans who did not own eighteen-wheelers and who did not have to evade the highway patrol were snapping up CBs, participating vicariously in the culture of America's new cowboys, the over-the-road independent truckers celebrated in the hit country song

"Convoy" (five million copies sold, and soon to be a major motion picture). *Time* magazine ran a feature on CBs in May ("Jimmy's Break-through" was on the cover) and its users' "cryptic, demotic jargon," which "threatens to outdate any dictionary of American slang within months": "double-nickel" (the national speed limit of 55 mph), "smokey bears" (cops), "Tricky Dick's" (San Clemente, California), "Snoopy had a CB radio. So did Betty Ford. Her handle was 'First Momma.'" "People in our kind of society, torn from our roots, want to relate," the Columbia University sociologist Amitai Etzioni explained. "With a CB, you can have a personal contact with the turn of a dial."

That was what Plains was about, too—and the way Georgia, the state where Jimmy Carter's predecessor became governor by running the black customers off his restaurant's property with a pistol, had suddenly become cool. Looking in on Jimmy's hometown, America could partake of a sort of Dixie Disneyland. The news shows couldn't get enough of it: all the elements in the Democrats' once-fractious coalition ambling along its sunbaked streets—or street, really; Plains pretty much had only one, where every other store, Mondale later remembered, was "a Carter worm shop or a Carter peanut warehouse." This, in between appointments to supplicate the potential next Leader of the Free World for a cabinet post or brief him on the situation in the Middle East—or, in the case of Ralph Nader, recommend he read the antibusiness tracts *Taming the Giant Corporation* and *America, Inc.* to understand the corporate establishment resistance he would be up against.

Another establishment—that of the Democratic Party—swallowed hard when *New York* magazine reported that month that Charles Kirbo, one of Carter's right-hand men, had once asked, "Who's this fella Califano? He called me and said he wants to help." Joseph Califano, one of Lyndon Baines Johnson's closest White House aides, former general counsel to the Democratic National Committee, was one of the most powerful Democratic attorneys in Washington. *Who are these bozos who want to run our town and don't even know who Joseph Califano is?* In Plains, though, that fence was mended when Carter named Califano his "special adviser on family matters." He also went hard against Jerry Ford, in a press conference, on the steps of Plains High School, following the Senate's passage of a new special prosecutor bill: "Had I been president," he said, "I would not have pardoned President Nixon until after the trial had been completed in order to let all the facts relating to his crimes be known."

Then he started traveling. On July 22 he lunched with business leaders at "21" in Manhattan. (Billy Carter had dined there during the con-

vention; denied entrance because he wasn't wearing a tie, he borrowed the one the maître d' was wearing.) "One week after he attacked the 'political and economic elite' in his acceptance speech," Elizabeth Drew reported, he "told the businessmen that he would not come up with his tax-reform proposals until he had been in office a year . . . and he was negative or opaque about changing certain existing tax benefits for business." It made for quite a contrast to his rhetoric on the Democratic primary trail, during which he promised on each and every stop to completely overhaul a tax system he called "a disgrace to the human race." Ten-four on that, good buddy.

THE WASHINGTON POST RAN A BIG FRONT-PAGE BANNER HEADLINE ON July 19: "REAGAN CAMP: AIR OF RESIGNATION." It began, "Ronald Reagan has returned to his ranch from the last Republican state convention, with some of his top aides and supporters acknowledging privately that he may have reached the end of the Presidential political trail." The reporter, Lou Cannon, who'd been building trust with Reagan since he covered him from the beginning of his first term in Sacramento, found the Californian "subdued." Reagan told him, "I think my candidacy has been worthwhile." Cannon called these "the words of a seemingly defeated candidate who was going back to his ranch content, believing that he had done his best even if that best proved not to be quite enough for victory."

The *Post* also reported the day's estimated delegate tally: 1,093 for Ford and 1,030 for Reagan, with 136 uncommitted. But *Time* had it much closer, 1,104 to 1,090. And the *Post* soon climbed down from its claim after Senator Laxalt railed at the capital's paper of record like a reanimated political ghost of Ron Ziegler: "What we are seeing on the part of the *Washington Post* . . . is an effort to psych out Ronald Reagan's delegates, potential delegates, and supporters. It won't work. They are not about to be fooled into forfeiting that chance by liberals in the media who are fearful that Reagan will win." The next *Post* headline was "REAGAN CAMP CLAIMS ENOUGH DELEGATES TO WIN." But Ford strategists claimed sixteen new delegates had moved to their camp, with Ford announcing from the North Lawn of the White House, "We're getting very close right now to the magic number." Reagan forces then announced six more delegates, and said the new ones Ford was claiming had been counted in his column already. There were now more delegates being counted by both sides than would be present at the convention; the psychological gamesmanship had become absurd.

WHAT MATTERED MOST NOW WAS MISSISSIPPI, WHERE IT APPEARED SOME sixty souls would have it in their power to decide the fate of their party. The Mississippi delegation would have thirty votes in Kansas City but sixty voters—thirty regular delegates and thirty alternates, each of their choices counting for one-half of a vote. But it was yet more complicated. The rules of the Mississippi Republican Party stipulated that it voted at the conventions as a bloc: either thirty votes for Reagan, or thirty votes for Ford. The requirement that the choice of a majority of a delegation would control the vote of the entire delegation was called a "unit rule." Unit rules were supposed to be illegal under the bylaws of the national party. But the Magnolia State had traditionally been allowed an exception. Meanwhile, Mississippi's bylaws also allowed the unit rule to be set aside if a majority of the delegates and alternates chose to do so. A complicated business. But Republicanism in Mississippi was a complicated thing.

For most of a century, by most white people south of the Mason-Dixon Line, the Republican Party was viewed as little more than the political wing of the Union army—the marauding band that looted plantations, burned fields from Atlanta to the sea, and turned freed slaves into an occupying political army. The ruling Bourbons in states like Mississippi—especially Mississippi—indoctrinated the white population, rich and poor, to believe that a strong Republican Party, if allowed to flourish in the South, would court "niggers" as its shock troops: a bloc vote to revive the "Black Republican" tyranny of the Reconstruction era. So it was that to vote Republican in the South, where the secret ballot hardly existed, was to risk violence at worst and social ostracization at best. Indeed, preventing a viable Republican Party was one of the purposes for which the Ku Klux Klan was formed.

After Reconstruction, Southern Republican organizations were shells, "post office parties" that existed merely for the purpose of choosing delegations to Republican conventions. These Southern Republican delegations served a crucial ideological purpose within a Republican Party that prided itself on its racial tolerance, because the delegations were mostly African-American—"black and tan," as they were known. The organizations weren't real parties. For thirty-six years, indeed, Mississippi's black Republican chairman didn't even live in Mississippi.

That ended abruptly in 1964, when a Democratic president from the South signed his landmark civil rights bill and the Republicans nominated a senator, Barry Goldwater, who opposed it. Mississippi voted 87 percent for Goldwater in 1964—only three months after FBI agents pulled the rotting corpses of three Northern civil rights workers—James

Chaney, Michael Schwerner, and Andrew Goodman—out from beneath the earthen dam where they'd been buried by Klansmen with the cooperation of local law enforcement. The state's all-white Democratic Party ran Mississippi as a racist terror-state—but after the national Democratic Party betrayed them, conservatives chose, as Barry Goldwater once put it, to "go hunting where the ducks are." Republicans recruited segregationists to their side with the argument that their party shared the Southern view that the federal government was a tyranny. Mississippi's Republican platform read, "We feel segregation of the races is absolutely essential to harmonious racial relations and the continued progress of both races in the State of Mississippi."

Desegregation, when it finally started coming, was a moderating influence. The Republican candidate for governor in 1967, Rubel Phillips, said he hoped blacks would "become productive citizens and be taken off the welfare rolls," which counted as moderation when compared with incumbent John Bell Williams's favorite quip on the stump: "N.A.A.C.P. stands for 'Niggers, Apes, Alligators, Coons, and Possums.'" Governor Reagan made a campaign commercial for Phillips; his daughter Maureen campaigned for him across the state. He got only 29.7 percent of the vote, but in 1972, Mississippi sent two Republicans to the House of Representatives, Trent Lott and Thad Cochran. Soon the state party chairman, a dynamic, garrulous, and ambitious operative named Clarke Reed, was saying, "The race issue is dead. The GOP won't rely on demagoguery to win elections . . . there are other issues that are more important."

By then Republicans in Washington, and conservatives in Mississippi be they Republican or Democrat (like the incumbent Senator James Eastland, whose reelection Nixon secretly backed in 1972), were fighting for exactly the same things, in the same way. Like keeping the federal tax exemptions for the private schools that sprang up, often housed in churches, in direct proportion to the federal government's aggressiveness in enforcing *Brown v. Board of Education*. (There were 17 non-Catholic private schools in Mississippi in the 1963-64 school year and 155 in 1970, with each of their 42,000 students enjoying a \$185 state subsidy that typically covered half or more of the tuition.) Or fighting busing with the supposedly color-blind rhetoric of "neighborhood schools" and "quality education"—which was exactly what Gerald Ford said when he talked about busing, too.

That convergence, though, now had a political consequence, which threatened to cleave the Mississippi Republican Party in two. The state party had decided to try to build for its future by handing

out alternate spots to up-and-coming young Mississippi professionals. They were the type of people least in touch with folk traditions of the Republican right—such as an instinctive revulsion regarding arrogant Northeasterners. They were also more distant from the political folk traditions of the Southland—the anguished martyr complexes, the ideological dead-enders, veterans of the Yankee swells. Unlike the didn't see much difference between Reagan and Ford—and, other things being equal, they were more inclined to side with the establishment than with the insurgency as the best course for their own personal and professional advancement. The upshot was that the Mississippi convention delegation, the tipping point for the entire contest, was for all practical purposes tied between Reagan and Ford supporters.

Reaganites had not seen the problem coming. Clarke Reed was believed by Reagan's strategists to be a solid conservative. Mississippi was the most conservative state in the union. So the matter was thought settled: Mississippi would go for Reagan. "Don't worry about Clarke," went David Keene's refrain, every time a concerned Reaganite asked him what resources they were pouring into Mississippi. And indeed Ford might not have contested the state at all, were the race not so precariously close. But Reed turned out to be worth worrying about. His conservatism and his Southern patriotism appeared to be diluted by his lust to be a national Republican power broker—the guy national reporters called up for quotes. (He gave good quote, his Delta drawl dipping into the argot of a Greenwich Village hipster. Of a fellow political operative: "Man, this cat is good." Of Ford attacking Reagan on the campaign trail: "It turns me off bad.")

The Ford team played to Reed's vanity—calls from Dick Cheney, from Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz, from Bill Simon, from Barry Goldwater; that invitation to sit next to the queen of England at a state dinner. They thought he might be easy to shake. For though Reed thought himself a master of Byzantine political power plays, they believed he would be easy to manipulate. He tried to hold his cards close to his chest, bluffing a strong hand—even while, behind his back, Ford operatives called his delegation one by one on the phone and worked an old political trick: "I've got thirty votes committed to the president, and we just need yours to put him over. Yours will be the thirty-first. You can give the president the nomination." In that way they won what they thought were commitments from twenty-seven of the sixty Mississippians who would be traveling to Kansas City. The conservative in charge of Reagan's operation in Mississippi, whose name was Billy Mounger,

was outraged, claiming Reed must be running some sort of con. "You can't trust Clarke Reed," the administrative assistant to Representative Trent Lott, a Reagan backer, had told Reagan's campaign managers back in January. "He's a slippery, no-good son of a bitch." But Reed himself was just as livid to learn that his delegates, still supposed to be uncommitted, were declaring willy-nilly for Ford.

It was a mess. It came to a head at a final delegate caucus in Jackson on Sunday, July 25, just as the contest was becoming so close that the courting of undecided delegates entered you-can't-make-this-stuff-up territory. A delegate from Oakville, Missouri, named Marlene Zintel told the press what it had been like when the phone rang at the beauty parlor while she was having her hair set, and it was the President of the United States on the other end: "I could not believe it. I can hardly remember it. He told me he could win over Carter. He asked me if I would consider him and I said that I would." A Rochester, New York, delegate told the press, "I hope they're sending Air Force One for me because I won't settle for anything else." A New York delegate named Vito Battista told David Broder he would have been warmer for Ford had he been served Italian food in the White House. Ford won over an uncommitted delegate from Cherokee County, South Carolina, after his complaint about the cancellation of his small business loan earned him a personal letter of concern from the president and an hour-long phone call from the commerce secretary. Another uncommitted delegate was reported to have offered his vote if Reagan would arrange for \$250,000 in new business for his law firm.

And in Jackson, Harry Dent of South Carolina made the argument for Ford at Mississippi's delegate caucus. Dent was the White House's Southern liaison and as Strom Thurmond's top political deputy the man most responsible for ensuring Nixon's nomination in 1968. Dent was a Southern patriot—of the new, Republican breed. In the small Southern town that produced him, his great-uncle John "the Baptist" Prickett edited the newspaper. One upon a time, back in the days when South Carolina didn't celebrate Independence Day because it was a "Yankee holiday," an outraged reader called Prickett a "Republican S.O.B." Prickett, who of course like every other white man in the Palmetto State was a Democrat, laid him flat with a punch. The baffled reader, upon recovering, asked what was the matter with calling him an S.O.B. "But you called me a Republican S.O.B.," Prickett answered.

In Jackson, Dent made an argument that played to the old familiar wounded Southern regional pride. Dent had been with Thurmond when he made the historic switch from Democrat to Republican to back Barry

Goldwater in 1964 after Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act. After Nixon won the nomination in 1968, Dent ran Nixon's "Thurmond Speaks for Nixon-Agnew" committee to keep Southerners from voting for George Wallace. Then he went to work in the White House, given the job of assuring Dixie power brokers that Nixon wouldn't do anything to disturb the "Southern way of life." He stayed in the job under Ford. Now he said the same thing in 1976 for Ford that he'd said in 1968 for Nixon, when a late-inning candidacy by Ronald Reagan had threatened Nixon's hold on that convention's Southern delegation. The argument was that a president who owed his victory to the South would eat out of Southerners' hands.

"Now my good friend Clarke is probably a little peeved with us because we've been down here trying to lobby you good folks," he said, oozing South Carolina charm.

"But I told Clarke that you can't dress sixty beautiful women up in bikinis and put them on Broadway and not expect Gerald Ford and Ronald Reagan to turn their heads and look at 'em. . . .

"Friends, we're looking at you. My goodness, you're in the catbird seat if I've ever seen it. You know it took the whole South to do that in '68 in the convention. Now it's coming down just to Mississippi. Mississippi's got a chance to strike a real blow for the South."

He drove home the argument retailing a Redneck Chic of his own—with a hint of anti-Semitic code. New York's Republican state chairman, a Rockefeller protégé and Ford partisan, was Richard "Rosie" Rosenbaum. "It's a question of whether Clarke's gonna be the kingmaker or Rosie Rosenbaum's gonna be the kingmaker," Dent drawled. "That is, New York or Mississippi. Don't let us down, friends. I'm not talking about Ford. I'm talking about the South. I'm in this thing because I'm for the South, and I feel what's good for the South is good for the country and good for the Republican Party."

Dent almost, but not quite, prevailed. The meeting adjourned still uncommitted, delegates and alternates from each side shrieking at one another about sellouts and quislings and dirty deals, with neither campaign having any idea whether the thirty-one votes it needed would ever be forthcoming.

And so Reagan's John Sears finally decided on another strategy for the uncommitted-delegate quest: a Hail Mary pass.

ELIZABETH DREW WAS ABLE TO CONNECT BY PHONE WITH A VERY BUSY Clarke Reed, who claimed his delegation was now leaning toward Reagan, but that "the only way we could abandon our neutrality up until

the convention is if we had certain commitments. What Ford needs now is to show that he's going to pick a running mate that will be compatible with his philosophy. The split ticket is a nightmare and a horror. With the so-called balanced ticket between a liberal and a conservative, you vote for a conservative and if he dies you get a liberal."

It hardly would have occurred to him to make the same public demand to Ronald Reagan, whose public pronouncements on the idea of picking a liberal running mate were quite as strong as Reed's own: "I don't believe in the old tradition of picking someone at the opposite end of the political spectrum because he can get some votes that you can't get himself," Reagan would say, "because that's being false with the people who vote for you and your philosophy." Then came John Sears's surprise.

Sears had brilliantly stewarded Ronald Reagan's run from near impossibility to a dead heat. But when Robert Novak interviewed him in the middle of July, the columnist observed that it looked like he was now at the end of the road: Novak didn't see any math that let Reagan win. Sears responded by hinting that he had an ace hidden away in an unexpected place: the three big Northeastern states—New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania—where Reagan had claimed only 33 of 324 delegates so far.

Sears had that trademark saying: politics is motion. When your campaign sets the terms of the debate, you are winning. When your opponent has to catch up with one of your moves, he is losing. What Sears had decided, without consulting the candidate at all, was that he could put this race back into motion by picking a liberal running mate for Reagan from a Northeastern state—and force Gerald Ford to respond.

Which running mate? It almost didn't matter. The thing was to get the press to report that the race was back on. It was the only way to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat.

Sears explained the selection process to a reporter after it was all over. "We took all the Republican senators and governors," he said, "and that didn't take very long. When you ruled out those who were too old, in our party you didn't have too much left." In Senator Paul Laxalt's accounting the process sounded even more limited: "So we sort of backed into the situation. When you looked at the people who realistically fit into that slot, it was damned thin. Schweiker's name kept popping up."

Richard Schweiker—not to be confused with Lowell Weicker—was the fifty-year-old son of a tiling contractor from Norristown, Pennsylvania, who joined the family business after college, getting involved in Republican politics on the side. He was elected to the House of Rep-

representatives in 1960, representing a Republican district that included the swanky Philadelphia Main Line, after defeating a conservative primary opponent. His issues included civil rights, expanding Social Security, and establishing federal rent subsidies for the poor. In 1968 he defeated an incumbent to rise to the Senate, where he became a leading Republican critic of the Vietnam War and opposed Nixon's nomination of two conservative Southerners to the Supreme Court. He won an 89 percent rating from the lefties at Americans for Democratic Action. He had shaggy hair, longish for a senator, and sideburns. He was known recently—though not all that well known—for his service on the Church Committee, where he called the CIA a “shadow government.”

Schweiker was also obsessed with flushing out what he called “the failures of the U.S. intelligence establishment in their investigation of President Kennedy’s assassination, and their coverup to the Warren commission”—an obsession he shared with much of the American left. Though he harbored a few ideological idiosyncrasies (he sponsored a bill to bring Bible reading back into public schools; he hated abortion and he opposed mandatory busing; he was against gun control), he was by most measures a liberal, even an “ultraliberal,” as Evans and Novak pegged him. He was also a Ford supporter. In February he had charged Richard Nixon with attempting to sabotage Ford’s election by traveling to China just before the New Hampshire primary, and just two months earlier he had proudly endorsed a resolution adopted by eighty-nine of Pennsylvania’s ninety-eight-member delegation—the convention’s third largest—supporting Ford’s renomination.

Reagan had sent Sears forth to find a running mate with only the following instructions: someone who would help unite the party, someone he could trust and work with, someone whose ethical record wouldn’t embarrass him, and someone who wasn’t a member of the “Washington buddy system.” Schweiker, Sears decided, was close enough.

Sears called the senator on July 16 and set up a meeting. There Schweiker learned he was the campaign’s first choice—which didn’t shock him as much as learning that the plan was to announce the pick long before the convention opened, on August 16. This was an unprecedented notion—the heart of Sears’s motion-making surprise. The idea was to back Ford into a political corner by forcing him to announce his own pick, perchance to shake loose some conservative delegates if Ford picked a liberal, and some liberal delegates if he picked a conservative. (The presumption was that Reagan’s delegates were too loyal to budge, no matter what.) Schweiker was also surprised to learn that

Reagan didn’t even know about this meeting. “They explained,” Jules Witcover wrote, “that while the last word would be Reagan’s, ‘they had every reason to believe he would accept it,’ having requested their recommendation.”

Schweiker told them he would think about it. That took only a day. On the twenty-third, Sears unveiled the pick to his boss, gingerly: he first made the case to Reagan for a liberal, in the abstract, mentioning the name of the particular liberal only after a half hour. “There is a fellow in the Senate with a pretty liberal voting record,” he said, “but he’s low in the Senate with a pretty liberal voting record,” he said, “but he’s against gun control, he’s a big man in the Captive Nations movement, and he’s against abortion, and basically on all the emotional issues he’s got a pretty defendable record. And he’s absolutely clean.” Robert Novak later wrote that he was almost certain Reagan had never heard of Dick Schweiker before. And it didn’t seem to detain him that picking Schweiker went back on his every pledge not to pick an ideologically balanced ticket. “Reagan’s first question,” Witcover reported in his book about the 1976 election, which came out the next year, “was not about any aspect of the political strategy, or about what kind of man or political creature Dick Schweiker was, but instead, ‘Do you think he’d do it?’”

Yes, Sears answered, he would. “Reagan seemed pleased.”

The next morning, a Friday, the two men were ushered together into a room in Reagan’s house in Pacific Palisades. Schweiker had to be coached before going in not to call him “Ree-gan.” Ray-gan’s first big question to him was whether he would support his positions on the campaign trail and in the White House. Schweiker responded, “As long as I’m on the plane on the takeoff, I’ll be the first one out defending it after the crash.” He set only one condition: that he be allowed to say his piece on any policy disagreements, after which he promised to fall into line whether he agreed with Reagan or not. Reagan was pleased to hear it. Three and a half hours into their conversation came the word: “I’ve made a decision, senator, and I’d like you to be my running mate”—and then they talked for two and a half hours more.

So why would Ronald Reagan pick as a running mate a veritable stranger whose ideology by Reagan’s own words rendered him “false with the people who vote for” him? Surely because he wanted to win, and John Sears, who had gotten him this far, had told him this was what it would take to get there. But: then he had to rationalize this to himself—as a moral act, as a noble act, as an act consistent with what Ronald Reagan would do. And how did Ronald Reagan manage to do that? The same way he rationalized everything that did not accord

with the world as he preferred it exist: he cast himself as hero. He told Schweiker at one point in their conversation, "I have a strong feeling that I'm looking at myself some years ago."

He would convert Richard Schweiker from liberal to conservative. After all, he had converted so many others. It was his gift; it was his grace. Everything would work out in the end, gloriously.

SUNDAY NIGHT. REAGAN CALLED HIS MOST IMPORTANT SUPPORTERS. JESSE Helms got the call at 9:05: he made a note of it, he later told Robert Novak, "to record for posterity the exact time I received the shock of my life." David Keene called some lesser lights, like Governor Jim Edwards of South Carolina, whom he asked to come to Washington the next day, without telling him what he wanted to talk about. Edwards showed up with bells on. Then he was told about Dick Schweiker—and, according to Keene, "sort of looked at his watch and said, 'Well, if I hurry I think I can get back to South Carolina.'"

Reagan gave the press conference in California: "Since I now feel that the people and the delegates have a right to know in advance of the convention who a nominee's vice presidential choice would be, I am today departing from tradition and announcing my selection." He described the man who had just said he would follow any position Reagan wanted, no matter if he disagreed, as "a man of independent thought and action." He described a man who'd been in Congress for more than fifteen years as *not* "a captive of what I call the 'Washington buddy system.'" Then he claimed they shared the "same basic values." He rushed off without taking questions.

Schweiker, who was listed in a binder at Ford headquarters as a "C"—committed Ford delegate—then appeared in a Senate caucus room crowded with cameras, trailed by John Sears, his well-scrubbed family, and a grimly loyal Jesse Helms ("You won't believe how really conservative he is," Reagan told him). He announced that his new boss "in one fell swoop has united the Republican Party for November by bringing together the conservative and moderate wings of our party. It instantly gives our party across-the-board appeal." He conceded his selection would "blow the minds of some people." He claimed that "up until now" the Ford campaign probably had the delegate edge (this contradicted what the man behind him, Sears, had been telling the media)—but not anymore. He took questions. Concerning his position on the Panama Canal, he hemmed and hawed—then finally admitted he had no position on the Panama Canal at all. He also said, "We make no apologies. We think it's the only way to win in November."

The reviews rolled in. Howard Phillips of the Conservative Caucus said Reagan had just "betrayed the trust of those who look to him for leadership." Congressman John Ashbrook of Ohio, who had run a quixotic campaign from the right against Richard Nixon in New Hampshire in 1972, publicly called it "the dumbest thing I've ever heard of." (Privately he had told the Reagan aide who called him with the news, "Reagan can plumb fuck himself," then hung up.)

Steve Symms of Idaho, who had braved Republican cloakroom taunts as one of the few Reagan delegates in the House, said, "I thought it was a practical joke." Days later, he said, "I'm still sick." Clarke Reed told a reporter, "I've had it. I've said I'm ready to jump, but I'm trying to keep my people in mind."

Governor Meldrim Thomson of New Hampshire said that Reagan had "abandoned the conservative cause and scuttled his own political principles," and that he would not make his planned seconding speech at the convention, so as not to "assist in selling this opportunistic team to the Republican delegates." And that he'd prefer "someone like Jesse Helms." George Will called it "slapstick." The *New Yorker* noted that only a week earlier Reagan been deriding Carter's pick of Walter Mondale as too liberal even though Mondale had a 93 percent rating from the AFL-CIO's Committee on Political Education—but Schweiker's was 100 percent, and he had received labor's eighth-biggest political donation in 1974. CBS News ran a clip of Reagan saying, "I don't believe in the old tradition of picking someone at the opposite end of the political spectrum." The newscast next featured an outraged conservative who said that "the reason Reagan chose Schweiker was because Mondale was already taken."

But still, it worked, after a fashion. CBS's previous plan for that evening's newscast was for Walter Cronkite to announce that Ford had clinched the nomination. That might have ended things then and there. The Schweiker pick really had rescued Reagan. The question was how long the rescue would last.

HARRY DENT LEARNED THE NEWS FROM DICK CHENEY. HE PROMPTLY RELEASED a statement calling it the "most colossal political boner of the century." Then he sent to Reagan delegates a memo on Schweiker's record in voting for things like a bill to break up the oil companies. Keene made a breakneck canvass of the Northeastern states, and found no leakage from Ford to Reagan whatsoever. Ford's man James Baker was worried that they'd lose perhaps four votes in Pennsylvania—but was optimistic

that the pick would firm up the support of other delegates whose loyalty to Ford they'd feared had been weak.

The next day John Connally—who conservatives like Pat Buchanan had thought would be the perfect running mate for Reagan—stood in the White House driveway and proclaimed his endorsement of Ford, president.) Important conservatives—Jesse Helms, Governor Edwards of South Carolina, the editors of *Human Events* (finding “not a scintilla of evidence” that Reagan had “yielded to liberalism or relinquished any conservative principles”), Young Americans for Freedom, even John Ashbrook—swallowed their doubts and said they still were for Reagan. Utah's twenty Reagan delegates announced themselves “pacified,” too. But the man everyone was watching was the mercurial Mississippian Clarke Reed—and he now announced his “personal endorsement” of Ford.

“This kind of vice president,” Reed said, was “too big a price to pay for the nomination.” The Ford people at first presumed that this meant they had Mississippi, and perhaps the nomination, wrapped up. They found they had another thing coming. Reed had so squandered the trust of his delegates that he couldn't bring them along; too many loved Reagan too much. Ford made ready to travel to Jackson, his campaign announcing he was considering a “large and growing list” of at least a dozen running mates, though he would name only one—Connally. Two days later the White House announced the president would send out 4,518 letters to delegates, alternate delegates, RNC members, and Republican congressmen, senators, and governors asking them to list their preferred running mates, in order of preference.

Schweiker claimed he'd persuaded six Pennsylvania delegates to switch from Ford to Reagan and moved “in excess of thirteen” Ford delegates into the uncommitted ranks—though he declined to name a single one. The Keystone State's delegation caravanned to Washington to be wooed, first in the Senate caucus room by Schweiker, then in the White House by Ford. Elizabeth Drew took the political temperature of the caucus room: “If there is a Reagan supporter in the room, I can't find him.” One of Schweiker's best political friends told Drew how aghast he was that Schweiker hadn't consulted a single political ally before making his decision. Another told her, “I was absolutely stunned.” The state's senior senator, Minority Leader Hugh Scott, opened the meeting reading Schweiker's letter of resignation as a delegate; he couldn't very well serve, given that his vote was pledged to Gerald Ford. Then his junior colleague entered.

Schweiker looked shell-shocked. He had entered the political big leagues now. But he hadn't counted the costs. “He stands in a corner on the right, like a schoolboy who has been bad, and reads a statement,” Drew reported. She found it “more like a confession,” or “an apologia,” than a political appeal: he spoke of “trials and tribulations,” “shocks and tremors,” and then, apologetically, said he'd made the choice because it was “probably the only way that the Republican Party could be reunited, not become extinct.” The audience applauded only politely. The Associated Press reported, “Three delegates who had said they were uncommitted now say they are for Ford.”

Schweiker recovered in a visit to West Virginia, earning a standing ovation and winning over an uncommitted delegate. The AP's tally was 1,104 to 1,023, with 132 uncommitted—and Mississippi still up in the air. “Anyone who tells you he knows who the Republican nominee will be in Kansas City is really dancing in the dark,” one columnist wrote. “The contest, despite claims from both the Ford and Reagan camps, is still unsettled.”

HALF THE NATION'S COAL MINERS WERE OUT IN A WILDCAT STRIKE across six states. More than \$100 million in tax loopholes had been secretly slipped into a tax reform bill with nary a hearing or vote, including a tax credit to the Mobil Oil Corporation specifically forbidden by a law the president had signed the previous year. Ted Kennedy complained. Robert Dole huffed back, “You have impugned the integrity of the committee and some of us don't like it!”

Secret Service agents shot to death a thirty-year-old taxi driver and decorated Vietnam veteran named Chester F. Plummer after he scaled the White House fence bearing a three-foot length of pipe, making it sixty feet onto the Executive Mansion's grounds while the president was reading in his private quarters. (“He was just a quiet guy,” the detective investigating for the District of Columbia police reported after interviews with friends, family, neighbors. “He never made threats.”) It was the fifth incursion onto the White House lawn during Ford's presidency.

The Associated Press wire brought news of a raid by the Boston vice squad of a new “Freedom Expression Church,” which served free beer and screened the movie *Deep Throat* and whose slogan announced, “Ask and you shall receive whatever you desire. Free.” (“I don't see what all the fuss is about,” the pastor said. “We're just a group of people helping other people.”) Two young women sitting in an Oldsmobile in the Bronx were set upon by a man who would turn out to be named David Berkowitz, who shot both with a .44-caliber pistol, killing one.

Twenty-six children and their bus driver simply vanished in Chowchilla, California; for twenty-four hours, the only thing found was an empty bus. (It turned out to be a mass kidnaping: a ransom note demanding \$5 million turned up, then the victims escaped, then three bored rich kids were caught and arrested for the crime. "None of the three showed any reaction when attorneys entered not-guilty pleas," the news reported.) Ninety-four cadets were expelled in the West Point cheating scandal. Jimmy Carter raised eyebrows in his first general election campaign tour, to New Hampshire, for two reasons: first, for not waiting for the traditional Democratic presidential kickoff Labor Day rally in Cadillac Square in Detroit—was this a snub to the AFL-CIO?—and second, for referring to the "Nixon-Ford administration"—an opening-round low blow, pundits said.

Robert Vesco, the crooked financier who became infamous during Watergate for delivering suitcases containing hundreds of thousands of dollars in cash to the Nixon campaign, renounced his U.S. citizenship and turned up in Italy.

Ford's choice of a new White House science advisor revived the controversy over "Man: A Course of Study," because H. Guyford Stever had been head of the National Science Foundation, whose grants to the MACOS curriculum Representative Conlan now called a "new height in science porno literature." CIA documents were released in response to a Freedom of Information Act request concerning the agency's history of experimentation with drugs from 1953 to 1967, as part of the program code-named "MKULTRA"; a 1953 memo revealed that the CIA was considering getting enough LSD to produce 100 million experimental doses; a 1963 report said the research was "considered by many authorities in medicine and related fields to be professionally unethical"—leading to the inspiring conclusion, "Public disclosure of some aspects of MKULTRA activity could induce serious adverse reaction in U.S. public opinion." A January 1975 "Memorandum for the Record," signed simply "CIA Officer," said, "Over my stated objection, the MKULTRA files were destroyed by order of the Director, Central Intelligence—Mr. Helms—shortly before his departure from office."

Members of the American Legion, returning home from a huge convention in Philadelphia, began developing pneumonia and fevers upwards of 107 degrees; by the first week in August the media began reporting that twenty-two victims had died and 131 were in the hospital, an extraordinary mortality rate; no lab tests could identify the cause. The notion of a devastating epidemic that could strike without warning and kill thousands was very much in the air. There had been the false

"pantosomatitis" of the previous year. Then, in February 1976, just to show that not all such fears turn out to be hoaxes, the H1N1 virus—"swine flu"—killed an army recruit at Fort Dix, its first victim since 1919 (when it killed more Americans than died on the World War I battlefields). By March, two dozen top scientists met with the president to discuss the unprecedented immunization of every single American man, woman, and child. The Centers for Disease Control sent twenty epidemiologists across the country to study the medical records, around the clock, of at least ten thousand Legionnaires who might have been exposed to the mystery Philadelphia illness, or could have imported it into the city. "What it's going to do," the head of the Pennsylvania virology lab undertaking some of the work said on the news, eyes cast nervously to one side, "God only knows."

No, President Ford: the nation had not been healed. Ford landed in Jackson on July 30 for a five-hour meeting with Mississippi delegates. He emerged telling reporters, "They had a lot of good hard questions, but I think I answered them all." He couldn't say, though, if he changed any minds. Ron Nessen said that the team already had enough delegates to win on the first ballot, but that the president "wants to go into the convention not with just a bare majority." Reagan would speak to the delegates on August 4. Schweiker went to South Carolina "to show them I don't have horns"—and said that he would support Reagan positions, including antilabor positions, that he disagreed with a few weeks earlier because "I am now changing constituencies."

Schweiker's and Reagan's plane landed in Mississippi, though another politician's did not. The twin-engine plane containing Jerry Litton, a millionaire Democratic congressman from Missouri, and his entire family crashed en route to the victory party in Kansas City for his just-won Senate nomination while the teletypes were still clicking away with election returns; the four Littons and two others were killed. Hard to be a politician—all those bumpy flights on small planes. Hard to be a politician—explaining yourself when you had hardly a leg to stand on.

Schweiker told the delegates that, yes, he had indeed once supported Ted Kennedy's national health-care bill and the Humphrey-Hawkins full-employment bill, but no longer—because, he said, according to arch Elizabeth Drew, "Ronald Reagan had told him about this wonderful thing called free enterprise which could deal with those problems." He said he knew and respected the South, having gone to Georgia Military Academy. "My father and grandfather were Baptists. . . . And I do not grow peanuts!"

Mississippians were not moved. Reagan spoke to each delegate personally to shoot down a rumor that he would accept a spot on Gerald Ford's ticket. They were not all that moved by that, either. It was no longer a big deal to get a meeting with a presidential candidate. Looking uncharacteristically fidgety in a cream-colored summer suit at the press conference, Reagan claimed that "he [Schweiker] and I are identical in our views on national defense, on détente—we even agree on the Panama Canal." (He craned his neck, as if to see if anyone out there was buying it.) "I don't think I went opposite to compatibility with my philosophy!"

The running mates made a last-ditch visit to Philadelphia. They emerged, emitting undignified whines: Reagan said his Pennsylvania delegates had been subjected to "a horrendous amount of heavy-handed pressure to renege." (But, oops, the *Washington Post* interviewed two of those Pennsylvania delegates formerly for Reagan who said that there had been no pressure.) Schweiker said the only reason Reagan fans in the delegation weren't making commitments was that "they don't want to be pressured like ping-pong balls." He claimed that thirty Pennsylvania Ford delegates would soon switch to them. The state party chairman, once a dear friend of his, responded, "He has lost credibility with people who think most highly of him."

Reagan now claimed 1,140 delegates. Ford now claimed 1,135. That added up to 2,275 votes; only 2,258 delegates would be voting in Kansas City. Was Ford in the lead? Probably. But this thing was still up for grabs.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

"Don't Let Satan Have His Way—Stop the ERA"

IT WAS A STUNNING POLITICAL ACHIEVEMENT.

Ever since early in 1973, when Ronald Reagan announced he wouldn't be running for a third term as governor, features about his possible presidential run became a nice little evergreen assignment for political reporters; badgering potential presidential aspirants was just something political reporters were supposed to do, even if none of them took this particular one seriously. A Reagan nomination was akin to a second Goldwater nomination—suicide for a party already quite nearly on its deathbed.

The low ebb had come in June 1974, when Rowland Evans and Robert Novak quoted those anguished, despairing Reagan hands in Sacramento who dearly wished to work someday under Reagan in the White House but feared that the day would never come unless Reagan made "a polite but clear break with President Nixon." The political necessity seemed self-evident: at the time the columnists wrote, Richard Nixon's approval rating was only 25 percent. But Reagan's break with him never came.

In fact, when Reagan deigned to discuss Watergate at all—which he frequently simply refused to do, insisting he didn't find the issue particularly important—he continued to say precisely the opposite of what just about every other prominent politician said. During season after season of anxious soul-searching about what Watergate said about America, he answered that it said nothing at all—except that the nation harbored a whole lot of spoilsports who just didn't understand what America was truly about. "Into the hands of America, God has placed the destiny of an afflicted mankind. . . ."

It was the same way with Vietnam. Let the liberal editorialists at the *New Republic* write, when the fall of Saigon coincided with the two-hundredth anniversary of Lexington and Concord, "If the Bicentennial helps us focus on the contrast between our idealism and our crimes, so much the better." Reagan blithely told another story: not that the

Vietnam War revealed an America that suddenly knew sin, but that it helped reveal once more that America was a nation that redeemed everything it touched. It showed in his description of what he said was the work of the USS *Midway* that same spring. ("A tiny baby with double pneumonia was cured. People without clothes were given double clothing...") And when he so doted upon the returned POWs ("We walked out of Hanoi as winners.")

And so on, and so forth. Energy problems, economic problems, inflation: they revealed nothing essential about America, certainly nothing about what others chose to call its "decline"—though they said a lot, he insisted, about America's federal government, which he spoke of almost as an imposition upon America. "It's time for us all to realize that government is not the answer to our economic problems. Government is the problem," he said in May 1975 in one of his syndicated radio broadcasts, this one on how "money spent by government doesn't have the multiplier effect of money spent in the private sector. In fact government spending is a drag on the economy and slows economic recovery."

Though Gerald Ford liked to say that sort of thing, too.

It puzzled his political contemporaries: why had the prediction that Reagan would have to distance himself from Richard Nixon and Watergate in order to thrive proved so wrong?

And another puzzlement: how had the race between Reagan and Ford managed to get this far?

A weary Ford campaign aide had recently told a reporter, "Reagan and Ford basically believe the same things." And that was true. "[B]ut they project different styles." And that was even more true. Gerald Ford shared something with the suspicious circles: he liked the idea of national modesty. He embodied modesty, *was* modesty: "A Ford, not a Lincoln," as he'd said in introducing himself to the nation upon becoming vice president in 1973. When a political scientist interviewed his admirers, their favorite word for him was "solid":

"He's solid, not hot air."

"He's a solid citizen with the right instincts."

"Solid in character, not flashy or phony... consistent and predictable."

"He's down-to-earth."

Ronald Reagan was not down-to-earth. Nor, he insisted, was the nation about which, and to which, he addressed his panegyrics. Instead, it was celestial.

Here was what Evans and Novak had not understood. America had not yet become Reagan's America. Not yet. Reagan's America would

embrace an almost official cult of optimism—the belief that America could do no wrong. Or, to put it another way, that if America did it, it was by definition *not* wrong. That would come later. But signs were already pointing in that direction.

Certainly they had been there in the Bicentennial celebration, when Americans surprised themselves in their simple patriotic joy—as if Watergate, as if Vietnam, had never even happened; as if the nation's economy had never in fact been held hostage by Arab oil sheikhs; as if the Church and Pike committees had never revealed the nation's security agencies as cold-blooded outlaws.

And here is what Evans and Novak *had not understood*: that Reagan's refusal to wax morose about Watergate was not an impediment to his political appeal. It was central to his political appeal.

At the beginning of 1973, the editor of *Intellectual Digest* explained on the *Today* show what was different about the time when the POWs went off to war and the time when they returned: "For the first time Americans have had at least a partial loss in the fundamental belief in ourselves. We've always believed we were the new men, the new people, the new society. The 'last best hope on earth,' in Lincoln's terms. For the first time, we've really begun to doubt it."

And here was an answer to the Ford aide who was so frustrated that this campaign even had to be fought, even more frustrated that it had become so close. Every time a major distinction emerged between the two candidates, the nub was what kind of nation America *was*. The Panama Canal issue, for example. Ford's argument was, fundamentally, that the world's rules must apply to America as well, that the way America had all but annexed the sovereignty of another nation was an embarrassing and dangerous relic of another time. Reagan's riposte: the world's rules did not apply to America at all—for into the hands of America God has placed the destiny of an afflicted mankind.

Don't doubt. Blithe optimism in the face of what others called chaos had always marked his uniqueness—at least since, around the time of his tenth birthday, he began mastering the art of turning the chaotic and confusing doubts of his childhood into a simple and stout-hearted certainty. It marked, too, what made others feel so good in his presence—and what drove still others, those suspicious circles for whom doubt was the soul of civic wisdom, to annoyed bafflement at his success.

And now it was what had brought him to the brink of the Republican presidential nomination—if his campaign could just game this convention right.

FIRST CAME A WEEK OF PRELIMINARIES: CREDENTIALS COMMITTEE MEETINGS and Rules Committee meetings and Platform Committee meetings that were supposed to be interminable and boring, especially when an incumbent president was up for renomination. Not this year—the first since 1952 when the identity of the Republican Party's nominee was genuinely in doubt.

Close presidential nominating conventions could be extraordinarily dramatic. Smoke-filled hotel rooms, hot asphalt parking lots, convention hall back corridors could become like unto the alleys and cul-de-sacs of a casbah—you could disappear in the intrigue. The key to these dramas was always a single elegant, but portentous, fact: in order to be nominated as a party's presidential candidate, you needed a majority of the votes of the party's convention delegates. Come just one vote shy of that majority—even if you had vastly more than any other contender—and the balloting went into a second, or third, or fourth roll call, as many as it took to get to a majority. During that interval after the first roll call, *everything* could come up for grabs; an also-ran could become a front-runner in an instant, if only the right bargains were struck.

Even the possibility of a less-than-certain first-ballot majority could throw the situation suddenly into disarray. In 1968, for example, at the very last moment, when Richard Nixon's nomination was supposed to be all but assured, both Nelson Rockefeller and Ronald Reagan launched campaigns that were not really even campaigns. The two sides were practically in cahoots—in the hope that denying Nixon his first-ballot win would show him up as a "loser" who'd surrendered the confidence of his party, thereby "tipping the football," which Rocky and Reagan forces each believed they both thereafter might catch and so emerge with the big prize. It had come much closer to happening than anyone had realized at the time, until Senator Strom Thurmond of South Carolina, who preferred Reagan, cut a deal in which Nixon promised him a veto on his running mate choice, and if he became president, special consideration to keep Southern schools segregated and South Carolina textile mills freer from foreign competition and the Supreme Court conservative.

This time the possibility that the vote would extend past the first ballot was much more probable, perhaps even likely. A South Carolina undecided named Sherry Martschink became a celebrity for switching once, twice, and then again—making the *New York Times* for consulting her former dentist (now better known as South Carolina governor James Edwards) on the subject. ("He told me if I didn't vote for Reagan he'd quit pulling my teeth and start knocking them out. But he

was only kidding.") "At the moment I'm a lot more worried about the possibility of chaos than I am about who the nominee will be," one Republican state chairman said. And as July became August, and news about individual uncommitted delegates breaking this way and that, according to one observer, was "greeted by the media with the fanfare usually reserved for visiting heads of state," whispers of which wild card might usher in the chaos that might break the convention Reagan's way sounded everywhere.

There was the question of "Trojan horse" delegates. State laws bound a little less than half the delegates—943 of them—to vote the way they were assigned by primary results, but only on the *first* ballot. Within many of those state delegations, Ford delegates, given the job as a perk for loyal party service, were actually Reagan partisans. That could give Reagan a boost of forty or fifty or, according to one reliable estimate, seventy-five extra votes, well more than it would take to put him over the top in even the most Ford-friendly estimates, if the nominating went into a second ballot. And yet more intriguingly than that, Reagan's campaign chairman Paul Laxalt hinted that some of these delegates might be willing to break the law, voting by conscience on the *first* ballot. Why not? How many divisions did a convention parliamentarian have? A meeting in Kansas City, Missouri, after all, had no apparatus to enforce a law binding in, say, North Carolina—a state where all but two of Ford's twenty-five delegates were actually hungry for Reagan.

And though touts thought that designating Schweiker might have scotched this possibility—"Nobody's going to break the law for Reagan now," one potential Trojan horse told *Time*—the mischievous Laxalt had also floated a yet slyer possibility, which also happened to be legal: Trojan horses could *abstain* on the first ballot, denying Ford his victory, persuading delegates rendered emotionally vulnerable in the heat of the moment—these things moved fast—that Ford was a loser, and thus open the floodgates for Reagan once and for all.

Then there was the possibility of credential fights—like in the case of a New Jersey man named Joseph Yglesias, who replaced a delegate who'd died a month earlier. The replacement decided for Reagan, because, he said, "Mr. Ford failed to show concern about the loss of jobs at a Bayonne military base"—but Ford forces said that the method of Yglesias's selection had violated party procedures, and that the seat properly belonged to one Maria Scalia. Despite a previous accord not to press credential challenges, John Sears promised on August 8 to "go all the way with Joe"—and who knew how many others. The early strength Dwight D. Eisenhower and George McGovern had displayed

in credential challenges, after all, was what had broken the back of their opponents in contested conventions in 1952 and 1972. Or maybe the fight would be over the platform—where Sears could leverage nonnegotiable ideological differences between Reagan and Ford into a resounding victory for Reagan's positions. There was the Equal Rights Amendment, at a crucial hinge point in 1976: only four more states had to ratify it for "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex" to be enshrined in the Constitution. But in shocking referendum results the previous November, both New York and New Jersey had voted against ratification. Gerald Ford was for the ERA (as was Betty Ford), and Ronald Reagan was against it (as was Nancy Reagan). And there was abortion. Ronald Reagan was for the "Human Life Amendment" to the Constitution, banning abortion outright. But in a February interview with Walter Cronkite leading up to the New Hampshire primary, Ford had staked out what he called the "moderate" position, that "each individual state should decide what it wished to do." And then there was pesky Henry Kissinger, from whom Ford staunchly refused to distance himself, and whom Reaganites considered Beelzebub. Maybe some amendment could be whipped, forcing the president to twist in the wind around *that*.

Meanwhile, impassioned Reaganites impelled by state laws to vote for the president in the first ballot could vote any way they wanted on *procedural* questions—so, even if all the media estimates had Ford ahead by several dozen votes for the nomination roll call, John Sears estimated he enjoyed a twenty-vote advantage on procedural votes. Call such a vote at just the right time, on just the right question—one that, say, could be spun beforehand as a high-minded, commonsense reform, and afterward as a resounding political defeat for the president—and the president's aura of inevitability could be broken. (Ford, after all, didn't *have* impassioned supporters. "He lacks the ability to inspire people," one Ford delegate told a visiting political scientist. Opined another: "I wish he were more forceful and charismatic.") And once that aura *was* broken—well, then the nomination would fall like overripe fruit into Reagan's hands. Everyone wanted to get on the right side of the man who might soon be the most powerful man in the free world.

A PLATFORM FIGHT SEEMED THE SMARTEST PLAY. WHATEVER FORD'S DELEGATE lead, this was, by any measure, a predominantly right-wing gathering. In one survey 63 percent of the delegates called themselves "conservatives," up 10 percent from 1972, with the number who called

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themselves "liberals" dropping from 12 percent to 6. That was in part a function of a new rightward tilt in the nation's electorate—but it was also due to a historical quirk. States that voted Republican in the previous presidential election got bonus delegates for the next convention—so that in 1964, when Goldwater won only six states, five of them in the Deep South and the sixth his native Arizona, those states were further advantaged in a delegate formula that already favored states with small, generally rural—hence conservative—populations. In 1971 the progressive Republican organization the Ripon Society sued on the grounds that such imbalance was unconstitutionally antidemocratic. (Conservatives, in turn, called *the lawsuit* antidemocratic—an attempt to win through the judiciary what couldn't be won through grassroots political effort.) The suit made it all the way to the Supreme Court—which ruled that such things were up to the parties to decide. So the question was put to debate at the Republican convention in Miami Beach in 1972—and reformers, led by the moderate congressman William Steiger, lost in a floor vote, 910 to 434. (Nixon, who liked the rules as they were, did everything he could to fix the vote, including tapping the Ripon operatives' phones.) The upshot was that the eight biggest states, with 49 percent of the population, had only 37 percent of delegate votes—and these were Ford-leaning states, mostly. Put ERA, abortion, or détente up for a vote and you could stage a story line about a party abandoning the nonelected incumbent. *Presto!* A runaway convention. For many Reagan devotees streaming into Kansas City, this strategy seemed obvious.

But not, apparently, to John Sears. Practically every time a microphone was placed before him, when he wasn't gaming delegate numbers he was telling the press that he would be avoiding any strategy for victory that would unleash the sort of ideologically driven emotionalism that would divide the party for the general election. That, after all, was what had happened in 1964—and look how well the Republican nominee had done then.

But John Sears, he of the recruitment of Richard Schweiker, was a sneaky cat. Elizabeth Drew noted his "flat, round, moon face" and "light, mysterious—sphinx-like—smile"; he seemed, she said, "impenetrable. He moves slowly, talks slowly, and never appears rattled." He never told anyone what he had up his sleeve, even those close to him in the Reagan campaign; he never committed strategies to paper. He had, she said, "the other side thoroughly spooked. When they talk about him, they nervously cite his maxim 'politics is motion.' And they await his next move."

And no one saw coming the *next* wild card Sears ended up playing, least of all the Ford camp, who were left flat-footed.

MONDAY, AUGUST 9, WAS THE OPENING OF THE WEEK FOR THE RULES, Platform, and Credentials committee meetings. It was also the second anniversary of Richard Nixon's helicopter ride to oblivion. Writers noted the connection when they described the trailers the campaigns were setting up in the convention parking lot: extensive temporary networks of secret communications lines to the delegations and leaders and whips on the convention floor: phones, television monitors, walkie-talkies—not unlike the listening post across the street from the Water-gate used to monitor the Democratic National Committee, revealed when those Cubans were arrested that summer night in 1972. The lines were guarded by security cameras and swept daily for bugs. Because the Ford campaign's phone lines had to pass beneath the Reagan trailer, they were encased in steel to guard against possible taps.

You could also preview the fight to come on the lapels of the committee members trickling into the city: "BETTY'S HUSBAND FOR PRESIDENT"—something to bait the conservatives with the "GIVE 'EM HELMS" badges, for whom the first lady remained the nadir of America's moral dissolution. Posters bearing Reagan's face: "HE'LL BEAT CARTER"—something to bait Ford supporters by calling their man a loser. President Ford looking stern on *his* posters—a deliberate choice, a strategic swerve from the guy-next-door English muffin image. And one button in which the two contenders faced off Western-style, brandishing pistols: "Shootout at Kansas City." Which captured the soul of the gathering right there.

Reagan forces drew first blood, at a preliminary meeting of a key platform subcommittee. Before the full platform committee the previous day, a Saturday, Joseph Coors, the Colorado brewer and New Right donor, moved to let each subcommittee select its own chairman; that motion passed 43 to 39. So for head of the Subcommittee on Human Rights and Responsibilities the Reaganites were able to jettison the moderate governor of Iowa, Robert D. Ray, impaneling instead Charles Pickering, a conservative state senator set to take over the chairmanship of the Mississippi Republican Party in 1977. The victory came because Ford delegates had better things to do on a Sunday night, perhaps sampling Kansas City barbecue. "The right-wingers always come early and stay late," Ford's spokesman Peter Kaye, frustrated, told the *Washington Post*. The pundits read the tea leaves and saw a platform fight on the

horizon—because Human Rights and Responsibilities was where hot-button issues like abortion, the ERA, busing, and gun control would be decided.

AT A MEETING OF THE REPUBLICAN PARTY'S RULES COMMITTEE IN THE ballroom of the grand old Continental Hotel at Eleventh and Baltimore—this committee was separate from the convention's Rules Committee; such things could be confusing—John Sears rose to speak. The expectation was that he would oppose the Ford campaign's proposed "justice amendment," which would bind delegates to follow all state laws, keeping designated Ford delegates from voting for Reagan on the first ballot. The cagey Sears defied that expectation. Instead he proposed to add to the convention's Rule 16—of which subsection (a) said the nomination had to have majority support from at least five delegations and (b) said, among other banalities, that nominating and seconding speeches had to be limited to fifteen minutes—a subsection (c), which would say: "All persons seeking to be nominated for President under Sections (a) and (b) above shall announce to the convention and file with its Secretary a declaration stating whom he or she will recommend to the convention as the Vice Presidential nominee. This declaration shall be filed with the Secretary of the convention by 9:00 A.M. on the day on which the nomination for President is held."

Sounded boring. It was actually explosive. It had been the prerogative of presidential nominees since time immemorial to present the vice presidential pick *after* the nomination—present it, in other words, as a fait accompli, for the convention to rubber-stamp. Now Sears was saying Ford must do what Reagan did: name his running mate in advance, subject to convention debate.

Sears made an earnest, high-minded pitch for what soon became known to every political junkie in America by the shorthand "16-C." And there was an earnest argument to be made. The issue of presidential succession had been far from academic since John F. Kennedy's assassination. At the joint session of Congress in which the new president pledged to fulfill Kennedy's legacy, before Johnson had time to nominate a new vice president, the second and third in line in presidential succession, the House speaker and president pro tem of the Senate, looked so old and frail sitting behind him that they inspired a movement for a Twenty-fifth Amendment to the Constitution, clarifying rules for presidential succession, which passed in 1967. As for the running mates picked at conventions, the one chosen by Barry Goldwater was such a

nonentity he inspired nothing but jokes: "Here's a riddle / It's a killer / Who the hell is William Miller?" Same with Spiro Agnew, Nixon's pick in 1968—"Sparrow who?" someone asked at the announcement press conference. And everyone remembered what had happened to poor George McGovern: his selection process was so hasty and incompetent that the campaign never knew Thomas Eagleton had undergone electroshock treatment for depression. According to Sears's argument, the responsibility for choosing the man a heartbeat away from the presidency should be subject to the cool, deliberate vetting of an august body such as the one assembled before him—not a choice made in haste, via who knew what backroom quid pro quo. Delegates, he said, had a "right to know" what sort of ticket they were picking when they cast their convention votes. "I think most people worry about the vice presidency and the way that it's done simply because they wonder if someone isn't being paid off after the fact."

The savvy knew that he was spouting nonsense: that this was a political move, through and through. That once Sears's team whipped both enough disciplined Reagan (and Reagan Trojan horse) delegates, and enough naive reform-minded Ford delegates, into voting for 16-C, the vote would be spun into a narrative in which the Reagan forces were in control of the convention—and Ford's soft supporters might stampede to Reagan. And even if the stampede didn't begin then, it might after Ford suffered the same political awkwardness Reagan had with his choice of Schweiker: losing conservatives if he picked a moderate, losing moderates if he picked a conservative. This was not a "right to know" but a "misery loves company rule," complained one Ford supporter—the "right to save a campaign manager amendment," said another.

Be that as it may. Ford's side, for now, had no way to respond but with jokes.

The party Rules Committee, stacked with Ford stalwarts, easily voted the measure down. But that was only the first step. On Saturday, the convention rules committee could get to vote on 16-C, dragging the controversy out nicely. A Ford spokesman promptly announced that the president would announce his pick in the "traditional" way—which played nicely into Sears's hands. *Why didn't Ford trust this Republican convention?* The *New Yorker* asked Sears if he had any more surprises in store. The smiling Sphinx responded: "I really don't know what surprises you. There will be other things that will be newsworthy. It is our feeling here that this probably stands to be the most exciting convention that our party has ever held."

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THIS WAS CORRECT, BUT NOT ONLY FOR REASONS HE WOULD HAVE PREFERRED. Things soon got more interesting when a mutiny developed on Sears's right flank.

A Sphinx who offered too-clever-by-half procedural strategies out of one side of his mouth and insisted he wanted a united convention out of the other was not to the New Right's taste at all. Pat Buchanan, with his usual aphoristic intelligence, explained the New Right's way of thinking in a May column in *Human Events*. "Ford is a conservative," he allowed; but his was "a conservatism marked by wariness of conflict, resistance to change, and an abiding ambition to conserve the status quo. . . . It is a don't-rock-the-boat conservatism exemplified . . . by what Mr. Ford calls the politics of cooperation, conciliation, compromise, and consensus"—but thank God, Buchanan exulted, Reagan was there to lead the army of "Republicans who believe that conflict, not compromise, is the essence of politics."

Jesse Helms articulated another facet of the right's maximalist mindset on the Senate floor earlier in August. His colleagues had been mocking him for his loyalty to Reagan. William F. Buckley described what happened next in his newspaper column: "His eyes passed over the great chamber and he mused that this probably was the most concentrated group of successful politicians in the United States." (Recall that *politician* was a term of abuse for Helms; "I know nothing about being a politician," was one of his favorite maxims.) "He then told his colleagues that several of them ('You know who you are') had confided in him in recent months that they would prefer Reagan over Ford as president, but that they couldn't, for political reasons, make that known." Buckley concluded, "If everybody in and around government and the Republican party who is privately for Reagan had made known that preference, Reagan could have picked John Wayne as his running mate."

This political faith of a Bill Buckley, a Jesse Helms, a Pat Buchanan—and the hundreds of Reagan delegates who thought the same way—was announced in one of Barry Goldwater's 1964 campaign slogans: "In your heart you know he's right." The faith was that millions of Americans, both ordinary citizens and politicians, were actually bone-deep conservatives, but were intimidated out of acting on conviction by the malign hegemony of the all-powerful liberals. And the only way to flush out the Trojan horses—across the nation generally, and, this week, in Kansas City—was to deploy another Goldwater slogan: give them "a choice, not an echo."

You did things, in other words, like forcing platform fights. Not nuanced procedural schemes.

But such fights were precisely what Sears's strategy was designed to avoid. He reasoned that Ford would find it all too easy to water down the proposed conservative language, or just swallow, say, an anti-ERA or antiabortion plank, then run the other way in the general election, rendering the conservatives' imagined "showdown" more akin to punching a pillow—and making Reagan look politically weaker than he actually was. Whereas 16-C was elegantly designed to make him look stronger.

Helms wasn't having a bit of it. His planning for Kansas City had begun in July, shortly before Schweiker was chosen, when he called warriors of like mind to a meeting in Atlanta, where they began drafting twenty-two planks upon which to make their stand. They covered the waterfront: against gun control; for "sovereignty" over the Panama Canal Zone; for "superiority," not parity, in nuclear arms; for trade with Rhodesia's white minority government, whatever the United Nations said; a fight to the death for the anti-Communist Chinese government-in-exile in Taiwan; for constitutional amendments to ban abortion and forced busing and to require a balanced budget—and for throwing "détente" onto the ash heap of history. Four key Sears aides were there, too, nodding politely, each side adhering to a principle articulated by Michael Corleone in *The Godfather: Part II*: "Keep your friends close and your enemies closer."

Helms made his next move the Sunday before committee week, the same day Sears was introducing the 16-C fight. Helms invited fifty conservative delegates and alternates for some serious backroom plotting because the actual planks that the Reagan high command had apparently signed off on were offensively pallid. (The one on Panama read merely, "In no events will the U.S. surrender fundamental interests." The one on Taiwan said only, "We shall not remain indifferent to assuring the future security of Taiwan.")

They called their strategy "purposeful conflict on substantive issues." Helms insisted they were working "independent of Reagan and not taking orders from anyone." Insider pundits greeted that claim skeptically. Wrote columnist Charles Bartlett (sufficiently an insider to have once set up young Jacqueline Bouvier on a blind date with Senator John F. Kennedy), "Although a delusion is being floated that he is acting on his own, this has to be a Helms-Reagan strategy, because the two have taken the long, winding road together." He described the scheme as "raising a series of nerve-tingling, party-splitting issues which will oblige the President to take positions on which a majority of the uncommitted delegates may not be willing to follow him." He called that

"burning down the house to roast the wienie," concluding: "A nomination secured through the success of a divisive pull to the right will be no great prize," serving only as "a reminder that Helms belongs to that rabid band of committed conservatives who stop just short of conceding that they are willing to kill the party if they can't control it."

Like most Washington insiders, Bartlett was unaware that without Helms's stealth New Right machine, Reagan would have never won his come-from-behind victory there—and never would have made it this far. To pundits, the Helms forces were merely stupid—"incredibly," one wrote, "many of them did not comprehend the very simple politics in 16-C. They took it simply as a reform of the system, the kind of thing 'liberals' proposed, and turned their noses up at it." And, yes, this view had evidence to recommend it. Plenty of conservatives preferred gut feelings to math: 86 percent of Reagan delegates told a pollster that if he were the nominee he would defeat Jimmy Carter in the fall; the Gallup poll, with more objectivity, gave it to Carter, 64 to 28. They were the sort of ideologues who spied conspiracies everywhere. One told a visiting political scientist that at Helsinki, "a Republican president voted people into absolute slavery." Another, unable to believe a nice man like Ford could conceive such wickedness on his own, said, "If I were a political cartoonist, I would draw a two-headed Edgar Bergen with Kissinger and Rockefeller as the heads, and Ford as Charlie McCarthy."

But politics is about more than mathematics. It is also a matter of will. Polite Georgetown insiders didn't like to admit this. Sometimes they willfully ignored it—moderates could be as oblivious to evidence that didn't confirm their biases as any conspiracy-mongering extremist. Rabid partisans beat moderates all the time, precisely by dint of the very passion that sometimes blinds them.

And in any event, the extremists were too powerful for the official Reagan campaign to ignore.

Sears dispatched six of his top men to meet with them, Reagan intimates including Edwin Meese and Martin Anderson, and the Houston banker who had all but single-handedly saved the campaign back in May with a \$100,000 unsecured loan. The Helms bitter-enders appeared unimpressed. They emerged, Helms floating word that it might make sense to give delegates a *third* first-ballot option for the presidential nomination: Senator James Buckley of New York.

This was some Sears-style cleverness of their own: Reagan delegates could defect to Buckley, signaling their frustration with the Reagan campaign while simultaneously denying Ford the nomination on the first ballot, forcing the Reagan campaign to capitulate to the "true" conserva-

tives by the time of the second ballot, perhaps by dropping Schweiker. ("I think it's a distinct possibility," Helms said.) The New York senator, for his part, claiming he'd been approached by representatives of both candidates (though he was able to name only Reaganites), said he would not "slam the door." The Californian was asked about the news by the UPI for the papers published August 11: "All Ronald Reagan could utter was a puzzled, surprised 'Gosh,'" the article reported. Maybe these half-cocked insurrectionists were crazy enough to try a Buckley bid for real—who knew? "The possible entry of New York's conservative Senator James Buckley into the Presidential race has added to the confusion and the infighting already underway. With the nomination still undecided, the jockeying for position becomes more complex every day." And so the insurrectionists prepared to march into a subcommittee meeting helmed by Charlie Pickering to force confrontations on the "hot-button" issues—busing, abortion, the ERA, gun control—to flatten the opposition with an ideological artillery barrage. Not that sneaky sissy stuff favored by John Sears.

AN UNLIKELY SOUND—SHRIEKING BABIES—FILLED THE TOO-SMALL, TOO-hot hotel meeting room. Some of the squalls came from infants, cradled by pro-life activist mothers, many of whom were wrestling toddlers with their free hand. Others were recorded, and issued from the portable speakers other activists carried into the room. Some of those carrying neither infants nor loudspeakers held pictures of bloody fetuses. Others shouted insults at their sworn adversaries, who made up another cadre of ideological warriors who'd come to Kansas City eager to provide the Helmsites just the showdown they'd been itching for: the feminists of the Republican Women's Task Force.

The Republican Women's Task Force grew out of the 1972 convention, where Republican women had won a (watered-down, unenforceable) rule that the party should "take positive action to achieve the broadest possible participation in party affairs" by racial, ethnic, and religious minorities, and that "each state shall endeavor to have equal representation of men and women in its delegation to the Republican National Convention." That year, 30 percent of the delegates had been women. As 1976 dawned, they thought they might have a better chance with Ford—an ERA supporter, he of the feminist wife, with a decent record appointing female officials like Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Carla Hills and the RNC chairman, Mary Louise Smith. Surely it would be a piece of cake to keep the party's historic endorsement of the Equal Rights Amendment in the platform, perhaps with

even strengthened language. As for abortion, their demand was a simple one: keep the divisive issue out of the platform altogether—hard to disagree with that.

History, feminists were confident, was on their side. The progress, really, was staggering. Married women had as a matter of course been denied bank accounts and credit cards; in 1974 the Equal Credit Opportunity Act made that illegal. In some states, mostly in the South, women were omitted from jury duty; the Supreme Court banned that in 1975. In California, the entire estate of a deceased man was taxed, the taxes to be paid by the widow, even though under community property laws, half the estate belonged to the spouse; soon that was gone, too. In 1967 the first woman entered the Boston Marathon—and the race organizer chased after her and tried to pull the number off her jersey. She had to complete the race (time: three hours, seven minutes, twenty-nine seconds) surrounded by a protective cordon. But in 1976 the first woman entered astronaut training. That January *Time* had declared "American Women" as its, um, Man of the Year. "Feminism has transcended the feminist movement," the editors wrote. "In 1975 the women's drive penetrated every layer of society, matured beyond ideology to a new status of general—and sometimes unconscious—acceptance."

But not in Kansas City, where only 31.5 percent of the delegates were women.

Republican feminists had already been disappointed by Ford on abortion. In the heat of the New Hampshire primary, in that interview with Walter Cronkite on CBS, Ford had staked out what he called his "moderate position": abjuring a "Human Life" constitutional amendment, but averring that since *Roe v. Wade* had gone "too far," "each individual state should decide what it wished to do." The press, back then, had been surprised he'd chosen to address the matter at all; the *Washington Post* said the issue had "got somewhat overblown and out of hand." If so, it got more overblown that next day, when Betty Ford released a statement, "I am glad to see that abortion has been taken out of the backwoods and put into the hospital where it belongs." The *Boston Globe* responded, "President Ford would be a better man and a better leader if he paid more heed to his wife, Betty, who is consistently demonstrating that she has more sense, honesty, and moral courage than the man she married." However, what the liberal editorialists judged as plain, uncontroversial evidence of "sense, honesty, and moral courage" was in fact but a pole in what was becoming one of the most scarifying debates to emerge in American politics in a generation—a position that tens of millions of other Americans, conservative ones, believed to be

inherently senseless, dishonest, immoral, cowardly, or all of the above. Liberals tend to get into the biggest political trouble when they presume that a reform is an inevitable concomitant of progress. This is when they are most unprepared for the blinding backlash that invariably ensues.

As, indeed, had been happening with the Equal Rights Amendment, too. It had passed in thirty-four of the thirty-eight states required for it to be put in the Constitution for all time. But the setbacks in New Jersey and New York the previous November had been brutal. Its champions in the Empire State had campaigned with the slogan "All people are created equal," printed on red-white-and-blue Bicentennial-style buttons. The slogan "didn't work very well," the campaign's leader admitted to a scholar. "Our natural constituency wasn't turned on by it, and the average person on the street didn't understand what we were getting at." The opposition, organized into a coalition with the hair-on-fire minister "Wake Up New York," did much better with leaflets calling ERA the "Common Toilet" law. A local Fair Campaign Practices Commission in Rochester unanimously ruled that the leaflet was unfair; experts agreed ERA would mandate nothing of the sort; the coalition continued using it anyway, calling the FCPC a "kangaroo court." They told the story, too, of a mining camp in Montana, which had a state ERA, where women were forced to use the same restrooms as men; the pro-ERA forces then pointed out that the mining camp in question in fact did not even have female employees. Wake Up New York still kept making the same claims—and won, in November 1975, with 57 percent of the vote.

And so, the following summer, the Republican Women's Task Force booked rooms across the Missouri River in Kansas, in protest against the Show Me State's failure to ratify the ERA. They dropped a rules challenge to delegations with too few women when advised it might threaten Ford's nomination. But they rebuffed warnings that an abortion fight would embarrass the president. "We believed the party must take a stand for abortion rights," one of their leaders, a Republican activist named Tanya Melich, wrote later. "If the Republican Party was going to give up on women's freedom, there had to at least be a fight."

The language the subcommittee debated proposed "to restore protection of the right to life of unborn children," without specifying state or federal action, and criticized a recent Supreme Court decision allowing minor children to obtain abortions without parental consent under some circumstances. It was introduced by Robert Dole, who had barely won back his seat in the Watergate backlash election of 1974 against a pro-choice obstetrician. He believed his slim margin of victory had

come from his strong right-to-life stance and the energy antiabortion warriors had poured into his campaign.

He was eager to cement those political gains for himself. But his language was not nearly far right enough for the forces led by Helms: dodging the question of federal action, and a constitutional amendment, it was just the sort of Ford straddle they despised. (The Democrats went with an only slightly less anodyne statement: "We fully recognize the religious and ethical nature of the concerns which many Americans have on the subject of abortion. We feel, however, that it is undesirable to attempt to amend the U.S. Constitution to overturn the Supreme Court decision in this area.") The conservatives in the room were out of step with the convention as a whole, which was if anything to the left of the Republican Women's Task Force's position to drop abortion from the platform altogether: a survey of 449 randomly selected convention delegates found that a majority of 60 to 32 percent agreed it was "the right of a woman to decide whether to have an abortion"; even 48 percent of Reagan supporters agreed.

But when you believed a society gone mad was sanctioning genocide, math like that didn't matter much.

The debate began. Witnesses addressed a fifteen-member subcommittee stacked by Ford's team in consultation with Reagan's, with only three pro-choice but nine pro-life members—the apparent calculation being that a more even representation would heighten the confrontation. That calculation proved wrong. Private security guards prowled the corridors outside; inside, photographers and reporters and TV cameramen jostled for space with pro-lifers shouting about the "mass murderers and baby-killers" on the other side. "The more epithets they shouted at us, the happier they seemed," Melich wrote. "Our testimony was thoughtful and reasonable"—though her opponents surely judged it brainless and insane. The vote was called: ten to one for Dole's antiabortion language.

A discussion on the ERA language, which supported efforts for equality for women but didn't specifically mention the constitutional amendment—a starting place already to the right of any previous Republican platform since 1940—was gavelled forth. Opponents' signs read, "DON'T LET SATAN HAVE HIS WAY—STOP THE ERA," "ABORT ERA," and "MY DAUGHTERS HAVE THE RIGHT TO BE HOMEMAKERS—DON'T LET THE ERA TAKE IT AWAY," and referenced the perversions of nature like homosexual marriage that would surely follow its passage. A pro-ERA subcommittee member pronounced himself baffled: "It is a basic guarantee of women's rights—there is no basis in it for abortion or homosexual marriages." The vote deadlocked, seven to seven—a shock to the

feminists, given that Ford forces whipped in favor of it. The subcommittee then voted ten to three to endorse voluntary prayer in the schools. Another subcommittee approved Ford's preferred language that America would not give up rights over any area of Panama "necessary for the protection of security of the U.S. and the entire Western Hemisphere." The Associated Press reported that this particular vote "gave Ford a narrow edge in the first major convention confrontation"—because, AP said, "It was on the foreign policy planks that Ford strategists said they had to engage in a test of strength with the Reagan forces rather than commit the party to positions contradicting the policies pursued by Ford and Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger. . . . On domestic issues such as abortion and school busing, the Ford and Reagan positions were close enough in principle that the President's manager felt he had plenty of room for agreement."

On CBS, Eric Sevareid predicted that the Republican Party would go the way of the Whigs if the "revival tent across the road where the orthodox could kneel and touch the remnant of their true cross"—the Reagan campaign, headquartered at the Alameda Plaza Hotel—prevailed. The question remained, though: Which Reagan campaign? The ERA and abortion fights would go next to the full Platform Committee—but so would some of the twenty-two Helms planks, filed as minority reports, which the *Washington Post* reported might receive forty-five out of the 106 Platform Committee votes. The Platform Committee held its opening debate, on gun control, where "Reagan supporters"—the Associated Press didn't specify which ones; perhaps it didn't even know—"defeated an attempt to water down a plank putting the Republicans on record in opposition to all forms of gun control." The 16-C fight, Sears's ace in the hole against Ford's first-ballot nomination, would soon go on to the full Rules Committee—but without buy-in from those selfsame Helms devotees.

It was only halfway through preconvention week, and the intrigue had hardly begun.

ON THURSDAY THE PRESIDENT NAMED NAMES. AMONG THE RUNNING mates he was considering, the White House announced, were senators Bill Brock of Tennessee, Jim Buckley of New York, and John Connelly, all conservatives—and Lowell Weicker, the liberal senator who'd been among Nixon's most relentless pursuers on the Ervin Committee; Edward Brooke, the liberal senator who happened to be black; and Mark Hatfield, the liberal senator who'd been the Senate's second most aggressive Vietnam dove, behind George McGovern. The list

also included William Ruckelshaus and Howard Baker, two ideological moderates who were also Watergate heroes, at a time when the Reagan position—that Watergate was a liberal witch hunt—was becoming more and more conservatives' standby position. Clarke Reed, chief of the still-uncommitted Mississippi delegation, suddenly used this list as an opportunity to save face with his conservative brethren—who were flooding him with letters and telegrams and phone calls calling him a traitor or a quisling or worse—and announced that, since the president was "considering several possible running mates to the left of the mainstream of the Republican Party," he was reconsidering his previously pledged loyalty to Ford.

He had already, at the meeting of the party Rules Committee, threatened to break with the Ford campaign and vote for 16-C when the convention's Rules Committee met Saturday—in other words, vote with the Reagan side to force Ford to name his running mate early.

Saturday came.

On TV: a riot of colorful confetti-and-balloon-laden ceremonies; "Youth for Reagan" sending off their hero in Los Angeles, then boarding their own buses for Kansas City (back on the radio in October, Reagan would exaggerate their sacrifice as a "forty-eight-hour" bus ride); Richard Schweiker and his wife arrived to enthusiastic crowds at the Kansas City airport. Rockefeller and his wife, Happy, touched down to talk from Rockefeller's aides, humiliating to the president, that Rockefeller might still make a great running mate. Then he spoke before the full Platform Committee: "Americans must see events in their true light and not permit emotionalism to substitute for moral judgement."

Behind closed doors: breakfast deep within the Ford high command in the Crown Center Hotel, the most powerful men in the Republican Party surrounding Clarke Reed and warning him of dire consequences if he crossed them at the Rules Committee meeting that afternoon.

Reed assured them, "I'll be all right on 16-C. . . . I'm not going to flip. They ain't gonna get me."

Came the afternoon Rules Committee meeting. Rarely had a boring backroom meeting on convention procedures been so closely watched. John Sears worked his hustle, arguing that his was simply a commonsense reform: "Trust the delegates. . . . All it does is put the delegates and the people in the candidates' confidence before it is the irrevocable choice of the party." A Reagan delegate recalled, "People were all around us, these little Hitler Gestapo guys with walkie-talkies. They'd radio back to command headquarters about who did not vote properly."

The question was called, the proposed rule failing by a vote of fifty-

nine to forty—the gestapo guys apparently prevailing. A naive Ford aide, one of his top men, told the *Washington Post*, “We’re out of the procedural minefield now”—ignorant that things were unfolding just as Sears planned: losers of full-committee votes had the opportunity to file minority reports to bring the question before the entire convention if they received but 25 percent of a full committee’s 106 members. Which meant a floor fight, live on prime-time TV. Which had been Sears’s plan all along.

And Clarke Reed? He’d flipped. He voted with Reagan.

He excused himself by saying that, since Ford won decisively, they hadn’t needed his vote anyway. He was working every side of the street. And it was still only beginning. Both sides fanned out their deputies to hostelrys across the Missouri River valley, getting their ducks in a row for a vote scheduled for the Tuesday evening of the convention on an obscure little procedural question that might well decide who became the next President of the United States.

THAT SAME SATURDAY AFTERNOON THE FEMINISTS WERE GETTING THEIR ducks in a row on abortion. Their point woman was the Platform Committee’s only feminist officeholder. Millicent Fenwick was brash, spicy, a Katharine Hepburn character come to life: after her doctor warned her against cigarettes, she started smoking a pipe. She was a former fashion model who’d become a New Jersey congresswoman at age sixty-four. Wayne Hays once threatened to keep her staff from getting paid “if that woman doesn’t sit down and keep quiet.” A male colleague, in a debate on the ERA, addressed her on the House floor: “I just don’t like this amendment. I’ve always thought of women as kissable, cuddly and smelling good.” She replied, “That’s the way I feel about men, too. I only hope for your sake that you haven’t been disappointed as often as I have.”

Her job that Saturday was leading the debate to try to ensure that the issue upon which they believed the very liberty of women to control their own lives hinged was *not* mentioned in the Republican Party’s 1976 platform. But “in another hot room,” Tanya Melich wrote, “again filled with a profusion of television cameras and right-to-life and pro-choice partisans, and a surfeit of security guards,” Fenwick failed. The vote was twenty-six to sixty-five—one shy of the twenty-seven needed to bring a minority report for a floor debate recommending that the platform not mention abortion.

The members of the Republican Women’s Task Force thought they could get twenty-seven signatures, though, for a minority report recommending the following plank: “*There is no wide public consensus on this*

issue. It is felt by some to be a moral issue and by others to be an issue of personal choice, but most agree it should not be in a political party platform. . . . [W]e think that the Republican party platform, like those of years past, should not attempt to commit its candidates and officers, as well as members, as though this were a traditional political issue.” They had forty hours to file the signatures. They decided on stealth—if the Ford campaign found out, it might put a stop to the potential disruption. But stealth wasn’t hard to achieve, since the press was preoccupied with the 16-C soap opera. Armed with lists of Platform Committee members and their addresses at hotels across the city and its environs, they bodied forth, located their quarry, and found little resistance: “Glad you’re doing this, thank God someone’s concerned.” “This is right.” “What’s gotten into Ford?” Two of their signatories were doctors. Several more were doctors’ wives. Four were pledged to Ronald Reagan. They reached one sleeping delegate at his airport hotel an hour away at midnight; he signed in his pajamas. “They represented,” Melich remembered, “every section of the nation but one. It was as though we were reliving the Civil War. No one from the South or the Border States was represented, except Faye Chiles of Tennessee, and Tennessee had been on the Union side.”

The same regional balance of forces had marked the full Platform Committee’s earlier vote on ERA—fifty-one to forty-seven to keep it, a squeaker. Then John Sears asked Phyllis Schlafly to forgo the attempt to win her own minority report for a floor fight. More politically disciplined than Jesse Helms, she acceded. “I consider it immensely more important that Reagan be nominated. If Reagan is nominated, the platform is irrelevant because Reagan is against ERA and Mrs. Reagan is against ERA. If Reagan is nominated, we’ve won.”

GERALD FORD HAD REACHED A SIMILAR CONCLUSION: ALMOST ANY IN-sult on the platform could be swallowed, if it advanced his nomination. Coincidentally, Sears was backtracking a bit on his strategy not to confront Ford frontally on ideology. He feared a genuine mutiny on his right flank if he did not throw the Helmsian fire-breathers a bone. “We were asking our troops to fight battles that were important, but were not the kind of battles they came to Kansas City to fight,” his conservative deputy David Keene told Jules Witcover in an after-action review. “You had to give them something to keep the blood warm in their veins.”

There also was the problem of the vote count on Rule 16-C: he wasn’t confident he could win, or win decisively enough to deal Ford a true setback. So he devised one more strategy, to kill two birds with one

stone: confront Ford with the one platform insult he *couldn't* swallow. Not the ERA, not abortion, not budgetary politics. But détente, Henry Kissinger, Panama, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Helsinki—the president's prerogative to make foreign policy, which happened to be what Jesse Helms cared about most, the soft underbelly where Ford's political manhood could *really* be poked. Surely he'd rise to *that* bait. There would be a rip-roaring debate on the convention floor: true drama, Reagan's vision versus Ford's. A debate Reagan had the votes to win, and one that Ford, because suitable foreign policy language was so important to him that his proxies kept the Platform Committee debate on the subject going until 3 A.M., wouldn't dare duck.

And so, as Witcover described it, Reagan's most trusted strategists, Ed Meese, Martin Anderson, and Peter Hannaford, joined Sears in "drafting a comprehensive foreign policy plank," to be filed as a minority report, "that was compatible with Reagan's position and party policy, but that would *have* to be contested by the Ford camp. The language had to make the challenge unmistakable, yet it had to be deftly worded so that it did not too crassly repudiate the incumbent Republican President."

Richard Schweiker alighted in ABC's suite and sat down for its Sunday interview show *Issues as Answers*, claiming hidden delegates, now as many as fifty from Pennsylvania alone. No one trusted him. Garry Wills noticed even Reagan distancing himself from him by consistently mispronouncing his name. Evans and Novak had reported, "Whereas poisonous erosion of Reagan strength in the South can be blamed on Schweiker, he cannot take credit for modest Reagan advances in the Northeast." He also starred in the Sunday morning papers:

WASHINGTON (AP)—Senator S. Schweiker, R-Pa., was a top congressional participant in a Nixon-era program set up to help find government jobs for friends of the White House, and members of Congress, government documents reveal. . . . Civil Service Commission investigators found the purposes of the unit was to assure "that timely and responsible action would be taken on referrals received from members of Congress and administration officials." Records of the special unit show that it received 134 referrals of job applicants from Schweiker. . . . Only the Nixon White House personnel office had more.

But the report had no apparent impact. No one seemed to care about Richard Schweiker one way or another. It was like a Greek tragedy about the fate that befalls bearers of vaulting ambition.

Ronald Reagan arrived in Kansas City, met by the usual delirious throngs. He said, "We come here with our heads high and our hearts full. We're going to come here and do what we have to do." He argued that he'd done delegates the honor of giving them three weeks to learn about his running-mate selection, where Ford would give them but half a day. Then, three hours hence, an incredible development: the president arrived.

Air Force One landed. The president ambled down the steps with the first lady and his photogenic children in tow (Reagan had only three kids present; Patti abstained), taking in the gaze of all three networks' live cameras, acting as if this was not an unprecedented sign of weakness: incumbent presidents were supposed to arrive at political conventions the day of the nomination, brashly confident, not sully their office by politicking like ward bosses. A reporter said Ford looked as humble as a pilgrim. He worked the delegates' hotels, trailing clouds of Secret Service men bearing plastic stanchions to cordon off aisles for him to walk through. A man wearing a giant Styrofoam Snoopy head showed up wherever the stanchions did—the *Peanuts* character was running for president, sponsored by Dolly Madison cakes, and his handlers were keen to get him in a photograph with Gerald Ford, who was busy re-wooing delegates supposedly already committed to him but now threatening to withhold their support unless he chose a running mate congenial to them: indignity upon indignity.

Reagan glad-handed at various delegations, too—then repaired to his headquarters at the Alameda Plaza Hotel, where he lunched with Joseph Coors, Jesse Helms, and a dozen other conservative movement leaders. Then he glad-handed some more. It was only at a late-night meeting alongside his wife, Nancy, that Reagan was finally apprised by Sears of the details of the strategy by which his nomination could be won: the 16-C debate and vote, then the foreign policy plank debate and vote before the whole convention on Tuesday night, the day before the final balloting. "Two rolls of the dice to take the whole pot" is how an old ink-stained wretch from the campaign planes, where they knew a thing or two about gambling, described it.

The *Washington Post* went to press with the observation, "The spectacle of a President enduring such blatant pressure tactics from the party rank and file is mind-boggling to anyone who recalls the manner in which Mr. Ford's two most immediate predecessors, Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard M. Nixon, lorded over their party convention."

Dawn broke Monday on a metaphoric shoot-out in Kansas City.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

The End?

"THE CITY OF FOUNTAINS," THE TOUR-BUS DRIVERS INSTRUCTED THEIR passengers to call Kansas City—more fountains than any city but Rome, went the civic boast. Like the one in front of Ronald Reagan's massive Spanish-themed headquarters hotel, the Alameda, which featured a frolicking naked woman. "The men have the look of successful business and new-car franchises, their women the aura of beauty-parlor habit and the bridge table," Jules Witcover wrote. They were welcomed at hot buffets with cold shrimp at receptions where busboys frantically popped stems into disposable plastic wineglasses, in hotel banquet rooms with the letters G and O and P hewn out of giant blocks of ice. Kansas City's hotels were putting on the dog: it was the first national political convention held there since 1928.

Hotels, and motels: there being not nearly enough fancy hostleries downtown to accommodate the thirty thousand visitors, delegations were stashed as far as an hour down the freeway. Pennsylvania's chairman told *Time* his place near the airport was "like getting stuck in the middle of a cornfield—you can't walk to a bar or get a suit pressed." The manager threatened to cancel his entire delegation's reservations until the chairman apologized; the place had four bars, and valet service, too.

Two hundred Texans, a hundred delegates and a hundred alternates, all pledged by law to Reagan on the first, second, and third ballots and in their hearts until hell itself froze over, were in a motel half an hour away. *Texas Monthly* sent a sardonic reporter to report on the home-state delegation for an article that ran under the title "Republicans Are People Too":

"A man wearing an authentic Nazi helmet and who has a red terry cloth T-Shirt draped over his beer gut blows a charge on a bugle, a sound that slices right through the glee club's gloomy rendition of 'Climb Every Mountain.'

"Yeah, Ree-gan," he yells. "The neksht preshident—Ree-gan!"
(The alcohol flowed freely in a thousand hospitality suites.)

Downtown, the hustlers vying for attention included animal rights crusaders who'd erected a four-foot-high display of color pictures of foxes chewing their own bloody legs off to escape traps, to compete with the bloody pictures of aborted fetuses; "Jesus Freaks"; vendors of elephant trinkets, Ford masks, Rockefeller masks, Reagan masks, four-foot-long drinking straws, the sort of silly hats delegates wear to get their faces on TV; a man dressed as Abraham Lincoln with what a reporter thought was "something frightful and unstoppable in his eyes"—assassin eyes.

Celebrities, trailing boom microphones: for Ford, Cary Grant, Sonny Bono, and Tony Orlando, spotted doing the "Bump" with Betty Ford; for Reagan, Pat Boone, and—"Oh, look! That's Efrem Zimbalist Jr. Oh, God, he's so beautiful!" John Dean, looking tanned and relaxed, was fawned over everywhere like a movie star. *Rolling Stone* had sent him. A reporter called that "a benevolent act of genius: they have provided the only evidence at this convention that Nixon ever existed."

The city's anemic red-light district was festooned with red, white, and blue bunting; several of the smut peddlers featured dancers in elephant costume in their windows. For nostalgia's sake, Alf Landon, Kansas's own eighty-nine-year-old former presidential candidate, was wheeled out, photographed riding his horse at his Topeka farm, regaling reporters: "There are some intelligent people in Washington, but there are more of 'em in Kansas." (Of Jimmy Carter: "Do you know anyone who has figured him out?" Of Gerald Ford: "He did exactly the right thing [pardoning Nixon]. It had nothing to do with Nixon personally.")

Political rumors, thicker than in an Oriental bazaar: the latest was that with Jim Buckley having removed his name from consideration, under pressure from the New York State Republican Party (which he couldn't afford to cross, as he would be facing a reelection fight against the winner of September's Democratic primary between the neocon-leaning Daniel Patrick Moynihan and the hard-left Bella Abzug), Jesse Helms would be placed in nomination instead. Rumors abounded about filthy hippie hordes set to descend on the city from up in the hills. ("They're all behind the monument," a cabdriver told a visitor, passing the city's World War I memorial. "You can't see 'em from here.")

Political billboards, mostly Gerald Ford's: the official campaign photo, PRESIDENT FORD, the one where he didn't smile.

Political street-corner sign-bearers: TRANSCEND GUTLESS PLACATER WITH REAGAN.

Monday afternoon, they all streamed in the ninety-degree heat to Kansas City's striking (some said bizarre) new Kemper Arena, designed